WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2014 Vol. 35 No. 1

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $40; Family $50; Concession: Single $35; Family $40. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $40.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner, Jenny Shield, Diana Collier, Devi Shanty

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188. To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 35, No. 1, January/February 2014
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
The recent hot weather that is baking our landscape, has made us all a bit uneasy about potential wildfires in our region. Certainly the remnants of several small fires along the Calder Highway are constant reminders for travellers to Melbourne. During last month, Joy Clusker submitted some photos taken of the controlled burn carried out on Guys Hill Rd in November 2013. Joy mentioned that this burn seemed particularly severe with the result of many trees burning out and falling, and old nest boxes destroyed. Yes, we do need reminding of the vulnerability and fragility of our bush to fires, controlled or otherwise, especially with respect to its faunal inhabitants, as they are often not mentioned when regeneration is publicized. As there were so many 'positive' photos submitted, I did not included any of Joy's photos of fire damaged bush in the colour section. Let's hope we get some good autumn rains to give our plants and animals a chance to regenerate from the severe summer weather and/or any fires. A good thing about the slightly relaxed watering regime is that many garden sprinklers on a hot evening are giving small animals a reprieve that is fun to watch.

Front page photographer: Reg Smart (obtained by John Lindner from Rob Watkins' files)
Brick Cap Fungi (*Hypholoma sublateritium*) photographed probably somewhere like Bullarto in the Wombat Forest, where the club has had many astoundingly successful fungi excursions. These fungi grow from wood, either around the bases of living or dead trees or from buried material. The common name refers to the deep, orange-brown colour (see small colour version on page 5).

Short Notices

Email Notifications
If you wish to be advised promptly of interesting sightings, events or other special communications you can subscribe to our club's email notifications service. Subscribers to the service who make an unusual or interesting sighting in our region can email all other members of the service.
Email **subscribe** in the subject line to info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au if you wish to join the service. Include your full name in the body of the email.
To be added to the list you must first send an email to the address provided. This is the easiest way to manage the system.

Willing to help with a new publication?
The committee is requesting expressions of interest from members who want to assist with the production of a new BFNC publication. Anybody interested can email their details and ask for more information about the project: info@bendigofieldnaturalists.asn.au

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Richard Louv in Melbourne
'As we spend fewer hours in natural surroundings, we pay a price physically and psychologically,' says Richard Louv. His best selling book *Last Child in the Woods* sparked an international movement to reconnect kids and nature. In *The Nature Principle*, Louv delivered another powerful call to action – this time for adults. ACF is thrilled to host Richard Louv's Australian speaking tour. Join us as part of the 'Sustainable Living Festival' to hear how we can reconnect with life in a virtual age – and spark the new nature movement in Australia! **Saturday, 22nd February, 1-3pm RMIT Capitol Theatre, 133 Swanston St, Melbourne Cost: $15**
For registration e-mail address, see back page
Editor's note:
Bill Holsworth has Richard's book and is willing to lend it out to interested club members.

What beetle was that? by Dale Little

On Christmas Eve, Peter was walking past Sandhurst Trustees, in View Street, when he saw a large black beetle on the pavement. Picking up the "dead" beetle, he put it in his shirt pocket to bring home to show me. Telling me not to jump, he placed it in my hand, and asked if I had "seen one like this before." Thinking I saw it move, I jumped and the beetle landed on the floor. We found a small egg carton lid and placed the beetle in it for later study (see photo on page 4). The most notable feature of the beetle was the iridescent green lines along each side of its abdomen. The beetle was approximately 50 mm in length.
Next day, with family gathered following Christmas lunch, the beetle was brought out for show. As the carton was passed from hand to hand it became apparent that the beetle was very much alive. We decided to photograph it before letting it go in the garden. However the beetle was in no mood to stay still and escaped through the opening in the side of the carton and landed out of reach under the veranda steps.

Searching the internet for possible identification and information, we believe it to be a large black ground beetle *(Hyperion schroetteri)*, a member of the *Carabidae* (ground beetle) family. Its habitat is the drier areas of North West Victoria (the Mallee), where it is said to be fairly common. Its larvae are said to be carnivorous. What we did not notice was the described unpleasant odour it is said to emit if handled.
Hawkswood (2007), writing about the *Australian Beetles*, Shell Series of picture cards, produced in the 1960s, notes that little study has been done on the biology of this beetle.
Interestingly, most of the information studied featured the green lined ground beetle (*Catadromus lacordairei*), a threatened species found in open woodland, adjoining wetlands. This species is both similar in appearance (although a little smaller) and its larvae are predators, known to eat other beetle larvae and worms. (Spencer and Richards 2010)

Summer delights…

A further observation from the inner city...'The photo (on the left) is not really good but it was the best I could do before the beetle escaped' (see story on page 3)

Photographer and text:
Dale Little

Joy Clusker took these photos at Mt Alexander on the 19th January and said that there are very few plants there this year, about six. After the very hot week she was surprised to find any. It is the Hyacinth Orchid , *Dipodium roseum*. This is a leaf-less ground orchid that parasitizes nearby eucalypts (and other plants?)

Wikipedia says that 'No leafless species of *Dipodium* has been successfully culivated due to the inability to replicate its association with mycorrhizal fungi in a horticultural context (Ref: Jones, David L. (2006). *A complete guide to native orchids of Australia, including the island territories).*

Celebrating the life of Reg Smart (to go with John Linder's article on page 8)
Images provided from the 'deep, deep files of Rob Watkins'

Reg and Bob Seviour at work at the Scanning Electron Microscope at Latrobe University, Bendigo.

Brick Cap Fungi (*Hypholoma sublateritium*) See front page &explanation (photo by R.S.)

Reg with a framed photograph of the Bendigo Double Waxflower (*Philotheca verrucosus, variety J.Semmens*). The original plant was found on the Semmens' property at Sedgwick.

Reg at work, photographing something at ground level, most probably an orchid or a fungus. He is wearing a particular kind of beret, called a Tam O'Shanter, which was a kind of weird head-dress for club members before John Lindner's time. Since John knows nothing about this cranial accoutrement, he refers you to Peter Ellis, who no doubt will be able to fill you in – but remember to reserve an hour!

Westringia eremicola (above), demonstrating its variability in colour.

(left) *Westringia crassifolia* showing the flat leaves of this species as well as the hairs inside its flowers

How to tell Westringias ↑ ↗ from Mintbush ↓ ↘
Photographs by Rod Orr, see article on page 10

(below left) *Prostanthera denticulate*, Rough Mintbush. Forms occur with pale blue, mauve-coloured, pink, or even white flowers

Prostanthera saxicola, Slender Mintbush (right)

Prostanthera nivea, Snowy Mintbush (bottom right)

More mintbushes…

Prostanthera aspalathoides Scarlet Mintbush (left) and pale colour form (right).

The 2-lobed calyx can clearly be seen in these photos.

Westringia crassifolia (left) and Westringia eremicola (right), clearly showing the 5-lobed calyx, the distinguishing feature between these genera.

And finally…
The article on page 10 states that the range of *Westringia rigida* (right) may be mistakenly listed in the Flora of Victoria as extending down to Bendigo…

…but, just in case we are being a bit too hasty dismissing the possibility that *Westringia rigida* could occur in the Whipstick and/or the Kamarooka, here is a photo showing its flowers - please let me (Rod) know if you find this species here. The flowers are white and attractively blotched & spotted with orange & purple - they are also very hairy, as shown in the photo (the 5 Calyx lobes are easily counted as well - there's no doubt that it's a Westringia).

An appreciation of Reg Smart
(passed away 10 September 2013, aged 101)

by John Lindner

Introduction – the old generation and the club tradition of venerating knowledge

Reg Smart was the last surviving member of the old (read "really old") generation of field naturalists in Bendigo. The people of that group had gradually built up their knowledge of natural history by their own efforts in the bush, encompassing many diverse areas of knowledge, learning the scientific names of organisms, and piecing together their many secrets. Reg was noted for his knowledge of fungi and orchids in particular, and for his excellent photographs.

Those people have now nearly all passed away. They included Bob Allen, Tom Patullo, Jack Kellam, Jack Ipsen, Leon Ruedin, Bill Perry and Frank Robbins. Bill Flentje is of course elderly and not so well I believe. Not all of them were actual founding members of the club, and present at day one, but that is not really important to me. I was indeed fortunate in having known all these people, most of them all too briefly. I not only learned stuff from them, but I was also quite affected by their attitude to life and knowledge. I still have a good stock of questions that I would love to put to the two Jacks (Ipsen and Kellam). At the time, I don't think I knew enough about the sorts of questions you could legitimately ask such learned people – I do now, but I have to imagine answers for myself.

My own opinion is that it is pointless mourning over the progressive loss of these unique people. Life progresses towards its inevitable conclusion. Our group is still replete with questing and deeply knowledgeable people, both men and women. They just do things in rather different ways. But they too are the bearers of the torch of knowledge.

A unique encounter with Reg

A year ago (*Whirrakee*, December 2012) Joy Clusker wrote about her chance meeting with Reg at Newbridge. At the time I was planning an extended article on Reg and the time has now come for me to present it. It has had a long gestation.

For many years Reg lived at 5 Ophir Street, near its junction with Old High Street, only a stone's throw from our clubrooms. He had ceased coming to meetings many years ago for reasons of his own. In his last few years, when Reg had got to the point where he could no longer stay there alone, he lived at Advent Care, High Street, Golden Square. I visited him there on two occasions.

I do not profess to have been a particular confidante or close friend of Reg's, and I have not known him as long as some others. But over the years I have been on several fungi excursions with him, I have visited him at home, I have talked to him at length about his experiences and I have some of his framed fungi and flower photographs.

On one notable occasion at Ophir Street, some time in 2010, I called around on my bicycle, and having talked for some time in the living room, I asked him if I could have a quick cup of coffee before I left – I needed an energy boost for the ride home. While he was getting the drink, Reg began to recount, completely unprompted, the story of his life as it progressed from Brunswick to Gippsland and up to Bendigo. It was almost as if he had the "chapters" written in his head, as the account flowed forth in distinct episodes, with no confusion or switching backwards. The narrative went forcefully forward. Since Reg was pretty deaf, his voice was loud and very clear, with a sort of steady rhythm as each sentence was enunciated. I just held off and let it flow – it was quite a privilege to hear this of course.

Now I have done quite a bit of tape recording of older peoples' lives as told by themselves, and I had been hoping to achieve the same sort of thing with Reg. When it was over, I asked if it might be possible to return with a tape recorder: "Oh no, I don't think I could do that", was the replay. End of argument.

The life of Reginald George Smart (9/8/1912 – 10/9/2013)

So I have only a quite brief outline of his life. Reg was born on 9 August 1912. His family lived in Hope Street, Brunswick, next to a foundry. His father had a shop beside the railway line. His mother's family came from Gippsland. Reg had an older sister and a younger brother: another brother died at the age of 35 and another sister died at the age of 20. Reg had three uncles, all of whom went to World War One. The eldest was killed at Gallipoli and the other two came back to Australia and lived with the family in Brunswick.

When Reg was a child, the family moved to the tiny township of Gould in Gippsland. Gould is now under the waters of Moondarra Dam as a result of the damming of the Tyers River. There were only 3 families there – the Smarts, the Macfarlanes (dairy farmers) and the Morgans (sawmillers). Reg's father had become an invalid, and died suddenly at the age of 53.

Subsequently the family moved to Bendigo. In 1920, at the age of 8, Reg was attending Violet Street Primary School. He finished his schooling at Rae's Hill School because there was no room for the older children at the Ironbark school (I take it this refers to Violet Street).

At the age of 14 or 15, Reg started out working for Stillwell's in Hargreaves Street. Stillwell's had 3 stores – one each for ironmongery, crockery, hardware and furniture. Reg worked for Stilwell's for 20 years, but after a severe difference of opinion with another member of the staff, he left and went to work for Hume and Iser, where he eventually became a manager.

Reg married in 1939 and bought the house in Ophir Street that he and his wife were to occupy for the rest of their lives. When his wife became ill, Reg looked after her at home for 13 years until she died. Reg went on living at Ophir Street until 2012 when he went to live at Advent Care in Golden Square.

As far as I can ascertain, Reg took up the study of fungi and flowers when he retired. He became quite obsessed about finding and photographing new plants and fungi. For photography at ground level and often in low light conditions, Reg developed various types of special tripods. Later on, Reg took up watercolour painting: when you look at his paintings, they are quite obviously the work of someone who understood colour and form. He also mastered framing, and in fact he worked for a time at Bethany Gallery in Bridge Street.

In common with the rest of the older male members of the BFNC, Reg was modest about his achievements, kept his private life to himself, was a bit of a rough diamond and developed a significant body of knowledge over time (names of families and species, flowering and fruiting times, locations).

Reg's contribution to the culture of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club

The following are my own understandings of the legacy of the original and older members of the club, to which Reg was a key contributor. They are based on my acquaintance with these men, and my own philosophical inquiry into what has made them important to me.

In the study of nature, understanding and inquiry were important activities. Considerable effort had to be expended to master the existing body of knowledge and to gain new knowledge. Truth and facts did exist: these comprised correct scientific names, correct identification, good botanical specimens, photographs and lists of species for given areas. There would always be more to know.

Before the advent of the huge number of field guides and references we have now, and of the ubiquitous internet, it was indeed possible for individuals to be huge repositories of knowledge. Each of these people was virtually a walking encyclopedia. An outsider, such as myself, could have access to this knowledge upon polite request and provided he/she was genuine. But I do not recall that

any of these people were smug, bombastic or full of themselves in any way. They certainly were proud of their achievements, and with good reason. They were the people who "knew it all" in one way or another up to the 1970s, when the trickle of reference books became a torrent.

The quality of the knowledge they possessed was unique. It had been obtained by personal effort over a long time. It was also mediated by their character, experiences, sense of humour, impatience, demands and priorities. It was not just impersonal or second-hand information as from modern field guides (invaluable and excellent modern sources) or Google (instant). Their knowledge came with a certain edge, attitude or demand. That kind of knowledge is unique – it can make a deep impression on those of us who are impression -able.

Somehow Australian society still does not really revere people with wide, deep knowledge of particular fields of study. These mainly working class, self-educated men set the bar high. See also *Whirrakee*, January-February 2013 (Noel Ruedin's account of his father's life at the distillery) and March 2013 (my thoughts about the legacy of these important people).

Next month, the tribute continues with another account of Reg's achievements by Professor Robert Seviour.

How to tell Westringia from Mintbush
by Rod Orr (see photos on page 6 and 7)

Our two locally occurring native species of Westringia are: *Westringia eremicola,* Slender Westringia, which occurs here mainly in the Wellsford Forest and in the Whipstick & Kamarooka sections of the Greater Bendigo National Park, and *Westringia crassifolia*, Whipstick Westringia, which is a rare plant with a very restricted distribution. Another species is found 'reasonably' close to our region: *Westringia rigida*, Stiff Westringia, is found in the Mallee region a few hours drive North of Bendigo - the sandy soils near Ouyen and further North are good places to look for this species.

While I was reading the relevant sections of the 'Flora of Victoria', I was surprised to find the statement that *Westringia rigida* extends as far as the Mallee vegetation of the Bendigo Whipstick area. However, the consensus (amongst the current BFNC 'elders') at this stage is that it doesn't occur here, at least, not in the places we have visited in Bendigo's surrounding forests. It appears that *Westringia eremicola* was once referred to locally as *Westringia rigida* and that, although the misidentification was corrected during the early 1970s, this error seems to have found its way into the 'Flora of Victoria'.

Our local Mintbush species are *Prostanthera aspalathoides*, Scarlet Mintbush, *P. denticulata*, Rough Mintbush and *Prostanthera saxicola*, Slender Mintbush. Different colour variations occur in Scarlet Mintbush and Rough Mintbush but pale-coloured or even white specimens are much less common than the normally coloured plants. *Prostanthera nivea*, Snowy Mintbush, is found reasonably close to Bendigo at Mt Kooyoora and the Terricks.

Here, at last, is the main point of it all - how to distinguish Westringia from Prostanthera species. The most obvious distinguishing feature is the calyx (the collection of sepals) - the sepals are 'fused' together to form a shallow tube which surrounds the base of the flower and is left attached to the stem after the flower has fallen.
In the photos on page 7, you can see immediately, that the Mintbush has only 2 lobes (upper & lower) on this calyx tube but each Westringia has 5 lobes - this feature is consistent across all species of Westringia and Prostanthera so that's all you need to look for. Of course, this is especially useful because you can still find the calyx even after the flowers have fallen from the plants.

Other features are not so consistent across all species, for example, not every Mintbush smells minty when you crush its leaves!

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday February 12, 2014 7.30pm
The 1st speaker of the year is Andrew Skeoch Proprietor 'Listening Earth'. Andrew's talk is titled 'The Biophony - hearing our place in nature'.

Family Nature Club
The Nature Club activities will resume in February, please check out their website.
Details for the February 16 event are still being finalised but will most likely involve a Spiders/Bug Blitz (with Jenny Shield).
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.
All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
Next meeting: 18th of February.

Connected by nature: In conversation with Richard Louv
Saturday, 22nd February 1-3pm RMIT Capitol Theatre, 133 Swanston St, Melbourne
Cost: $15. Please register at:
https://www.acfonline.org.au/get-involved/events/richard-louv-melbourne
see more details on page 3.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

SEANA Autumn Camp 2nd - 5th May 2014
(for more information contact Matt Comer or come to the February general meeting)
• Hosted by Upper Goulburn Field Naturalists Club at Marysville
• Based at 'Camp Marysville' outdoor education resort, including accommodation, meals, conference facilities etc
• Accommodation is two bedroom cabins.
• Registration fee ($38pp) is payable by Wednesday 19th February 2014.
• Accommodation and meals must be paid for by Friday 4th April 2014. Full cost of Accommodation and meals if staying for full weekend (3 nights) and all meals is $195pp (plus registration fee).
• The camp will include an interesting exploration of various aspects of the recovery of the area since the devastating 2009 Bushfires and other natural history of the area
Contact either Matt Comer or The upper Goulburn FNC direct for further information.
• Contact; Graham Page, phone 03 5774 7555 or e-mail: grahamvpage@gmail.com

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Advance notice
Tuesday April 8 – Lockwood South 7.30pm
Workshop - The Secret Lives of Eucalypts - The Importance of Beneficial Fungi
Eucalypts are a defining part of Australian landscapes. The quintessential gum tree is deeply embedded in Australian culture, identity and life. Although highly resilient and adapted to the extremes of Australia's climate, large numbers of eucalypts in rural areas are in decline. While some fungi can be problematic for eucalypts under certain conditions, many fungi support eucalypts through beneficial symbioses and protection from soil pathogens. Other fungi provide vital nutrients for eucalypts via the decomposition of organic matter. This workshop will examine the role of fungi in soils and their interdependencies with eucalypts. It will address the importance of encouraging relationships between beneficial fungi and eucalypts in local forests, farms and remnant vegetation. Participants are encouraged to bring along fungus specimens. No charge. Supper provided. Bookings: Judy: jcroc22@gmail.com